Ron Cantor · 8 hours ago · 8 min read

Are Modern Jews Related To Ancient Israelites? What The DNA Says.

One of the most tiresome objections that surfaces in my comment sections goes something like this: "Modern Jews have no DNA connection to ancient Israelites. You're not the real Israel." Or as someone wrote yesterday in response to a post I wrote, "There is no one alive today that has the DNA of a biblical Israelite."

Sometimes it comes dressed in pseudo-scientific language. Sometimes it arrives as the Khazar myth (see below). Sometimes it stems from Replacement Theology recycled from the Church Fathers. And honestly, sometimes it is pure racism. The framing of the question/accusation changes, but the goal is always the same: to sever the Jewish people from their covenantal identity (Romans 3:1-4, 11:29) and delegitimize their presence in the Land.

The problem for those making this argument is that the science simply doesn't agree.

What the DNA Actually Shows

Population geneticists have spent the last two decades mapping human migration and ancestry with unprecedented precision. When they examine Jewish populations around the world, the results were clear: Ashkenazi Jews, Sephardic Jews, and Mizrahi Jews all carry significant Levantine ancestry tracing back to the Iron Age—precisely the period of the ancient Israelite kingdoms.

A brief word on who these groups are—and where they all started. All three trace their ultimate origin to the land of Israel. Mizrahi Jews, whose name simply means "Eastern," are descendants of Israelites exiled to Babylon in 586 BC; many never returned when Cyrus the Great opened the door, and their communities took root across Iraq, Persia, Yemen, Syria, and the broader Middle East. Sephardic Jews descend from Israelites who had settled in the Iberian Peninsula over centuries, until the expulsion from Spain and Portugal in 1492 scattered them across North Africa, the Ottoman Empire, and the Mediterranean world. Ashkenazi Jews are those whose ancestors—also ultimately from the land of Israel—migrated northward into Central and Eastern Europe, settling across Germany, Poland, Ukraine, Russia, and surrounding regions through the medieval period. According to 23andMe.com, I am 100% Ashkenazi Jewish with 67% of my DNA coming from Eastern Europe and 33% coming from Central Europe. My wife Elena is Sephardic, her parents were born in Morocco, and her ancestors came from Spain. Three branches. Three exiles and dispersions. One point of origin.

This is not fringe science, and I'm not overstating it to score a theological point against those who believe that God has rejected Israel. Harry Ostrer's landmark research, along with peer-reviewed studies by Behar, Nebel, and others, established that the three major Jewish diaspora populations share a common genetic foundation rooted in the Eastern Mediterranean. When these populations are mapped against global genetic databases, they cluster together—and they cluster near the Levant, not in Europe, not in Central Asia, not in Africa—an area that is identical to the region of the ancient Israelite kingdom.

The findings have been replicated across several major studies, and the overall pattern is remarkably consistent.

Why the Exceptions Prove the Rule

One reason I trust this research is that the scientists did not claim to find Levantine ancestry where it wasn't present.

Ethiopian Jews (Beta Israel) and the Bene Menashe of India do not carry the same Levantine ancestry markers as Ashkenazi, Sephardic, and Mizrahi Jews. The genetic evidence suggests these communities joined the Jewish people as converts at some point in history, or represent isolated branches with entirely different demographic origins.

Now consider what this means for the credibility of the research itself. If population geneticists were engaged in rigging the evidence—if the goal were simply to validate Jewish ancestry claims across the board—they would have massaged the data to show Levantine markers in every Jewish community on Earth. That would be the politically convenient result.

That's not what happened.

Instead, they reported what the DNA actually showed. The fact that they were honest when the DNA did not match gives credibility to their studies. The existence of communities like Beta Israel and Bene Menashe—whose Jewish identity is real even if not genetically connected to the region—actually strengthens the case for the rest of the major diaspora populations. It demonstrates that the researchers know precisely what they're looking for and where it does and doesn't appear.

Dismantling the Khazar Myth

Years ago, a myth was birthed that the Eastern and Central European Jews—the Ashkenazim—were actually converts from a part of Russia.

The Khazar hypothesis gained its widest modern audience through Arthur Koestler's 1976 book The Thirteenth Tribe, which argued that the bulk of European Jews descended not from ancient Israelites but from the Khazars—a medieval Turkic people whose ruling class reportedly converted to Judaism somewhere around the 8th or 9th century in the region of modern-day southern Russia and Ukraine. Koestler himself was Jewish and seemed to think he was defusing antisemitism by severing the link between Jews and the Levant. What he actually did was hand antisemites a more sophisticated sounding tool.

The theory spread through white nationalist and anti-Zionist circles precisely because of what it implies: if Ashkenazi Jews are really Khazars, then they have no ancestral connection to the land of Israel, no legitimate claim to the covenant, and no historical identity worth taking seriously. In other words, if you take Abraham out of Judaism, there is no Judaism.

However, the genetic evidence conclusively proves this claim false.

Multiple large-scale genomic studies have specifically examined whether Ashkenazi Jews carry signatures of Khazar or Central Asian ancestry. The answer is clear: they do not. Ashkenazi Jews cluster genetically with Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews—not with Turkic or Central Asian populations. Their shared Levantine ancestry is detectable and measurable, and it is the dominant signal in their genome, not a trace element buried beneath something else.

Behar and colleagues, in a 2010 study published in Nature, found that worldwide Jewish communities show a common Middle Eastern ancestry, with Ashkenazi Jews showing the highest degree of genetic similarity to Sephardic Jews and Middle Eastern Jews, not to populations from the Caucasus or Central Asia. Ostrer's subsequent work confirmed these findings. The Khazar hypothesis predicts that Ashkenazi Jews should look genetically like the descendants of a Turkic steppe people. Except they don't. They look like the descendants of people who came from the Levant—because that's what they are. In simple terms—DNA proves that Ashkenazi Jews did not come from Europe, but, along with Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews, come from the Middle East.

DNA has proved that God did what He said He would do. He scattered the Jewish people to the ends of the Earth, and then He brought them back into their own land just as the prophets foretold.

Could there have been some Khazar conversions that introduced a small amount of Central Asian ancestry into certain Ashkenazi lineages? Possibly. History is messy. But the genetic evidence makes clear that even if Khazar conversions occurred, they did not become the dominant ancestral signal in Ashkenazi Jewish populations. The Levantine core is unmistakable. The Khazar hypothesis as a sweeping explanation for Ashkenazi origins is not a contested scientific question—it has been tested and rejected.

The Argument Against God's Rejection of Israel

Here is the theological challenge that every supersessionist—from Martin Luther, who claimed that Jerusalem's destruction was the sign that God had rejected the Jewish people forever, to his modern heirs—has never adequately answered: *If God truly rejected Israel, if He was finished with the Jewish people after the destruction of Jerusalem, then why do Jewish people still exist as a recognizable people?*

Look at what happens to nations that are conquered and scattered. The Hittites disappeared. The Babylonians are gone. The Moabites were absorbed. The Philistines are no longer. Dozens of ancient peoples were absorbed into the broader genetic and cultural pools of their conquerors. That's how assimilation works. That's the normal outcome of exile and dispersion when a nation is conquered.

But not the Jews.

After the destruction of the First Temple in 586 BC, Israel was exiled to Babylon. After the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 AD, the people were scattered throughout the Roman Empire and beyond. Yet more than 2,000 years later, Jewish people still exist as a recognizable people. They maintain distinct communities. They preserve ancient languages and liturgical traditions. They marry within their communities at rates higher than any other global diaspora. And genetically, the three major diaspora populations share the DNA of their ancestors in the Iron Age Levant.

In fact, there is no example in history of a people being exiled from their homeland for more than two or three generations and remaining a recognizable ethnicity, that is, except for the Jewish people. And not for two or three generations, but dozens—2,000 years.

Except for the example of Israel, such a thing would be considered impossible.

This is God's Faithfulness

The Hebrew prophets promised that God's covenant with Israel would endure forever. Jeremiah 31:35-37 makes this as plain as Scripture gets:

"Thus says the LORD, who gives the sun for light by day and the fixed order of the moon and stars for light by night... If this fixed order should ever be broken... then also Israel's offspring would cease to be a nation before me forever."

In other words: Israel's persistence as a people is not incidental to the covenant—it is built into it. The continued existence of the Jewish people is itself part of God's faithfulness. As long as the sun rises and the stars hold their courses, Israel endures.

The DNA evidence corroborates a central promise of Hebrew Scripture: that the people of Israel would survive and persist across centuries of dispersion and opposition. That their identity—rooted in both covenant and genealogy—would not dissolve under the pressure of history.

Renowned 20th-century theologian Karl Barth tells the story of Frederick the Great, who once asked his doctor, Johann Georg von Zimmerman, "Zimmermann, can you name me a single proof of the existence of God?" The doctor responded, "Your Majesty, the Jewish people." The doctor pointed out that the fact that there are still Jewish people on Earth could only be because God was watching over them. Fifty-three attempted genocides. Multiple exiles. And yet the Jews persist.

Time Magazine wrote in 1965:

Their mere survival is a miracle of history. Enslaved by the Egyptians, slaughtered by the Philistines, exiled by the Babylonians, dispersed by the Romans, butchered and hunted from country to country in Europe, the Jews not only survived, but also nourished and renewed the religion that undergirds the culture of the Western world. Christian theologians from St. Paul to Paul Tillich have agreed with the Jewish belief that an alien [the eternal people] were preserved for a divine purpose.

For Those Still Skeptical

To anyone claiming that modern Jews have no connection to ancient Israel: the science doesn't support you. The three major Jewish populations carry Levantine ancestry. That finding is documented, peer-reviewed, and replicated across multiple independent studies. The Khazar myth specifically has been tested against genomic data and failed.

If God abandoned Israel, explain why the Jewish people still exist as a distinct people—and why they still carry genetic connections to the ancient Levant after two thousand years of exile, persecution, and assimilation pressure.

Explain why the covenant that God made with Abraham, ratified with David, and reaffirmed through the prophets shows every sign of still being in effect. The DNA evidence is one piece of a much larger answer. But it's a significant piece. And it's one that replacement theology has never been able to explain away.

Israel still stands. The covenant still holds. The evidence—genetic, historical, and spiritual—speaks for itself.

To continue hating the Jewish people, instead of lovingly reaching out with the love of Messiah Jesus, is a dangerous path. Spreading conspiracy theories instead of biblical prophecy could have dangerous consequences for your soul. Paul was very clear about believers who were arrogant against the natural branches of the Romans 11 olive tree—he said, "you too could be cut off."

There is a better path, and Paul shared it in Romans 11 when he urged the Gentile believers in Rome to reach out in kindness to the Jewish people, provoking them to jealousy, understanding that it was Israel's rejection that brought the gospel to them. Paul did not encourage Gentile believers to judge the Jewish people arrogantly. He called them to kindness, humility, and holy jealousy—not hatred and conspiracy theories.

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About Dr. Ron Cantor

Here is a little bit about me. I serve as President of Shalom TV, the only 24/7 Messianic Jewish TV channel sharing the message of Yeshua.

I am a passionate advocate for Israel and desire to see the Body of Messiah have God's heart for the Jewish people. I hold a master's degree from King's University and have been married to my beautiful wife, Elena, and I have a boy and two three amazing grown daughters.

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